

What are ticks?

Ticks are tiny parasites related to spiders and mites. They attach themselves to animals and humans and feed on their blood. Ticks live in woods, fields and brushy areas. They crawl onto animals and people from the tips of grass and shrubs. Ticks can attach to any part of the body.



The two types of ticks that many people talk about are the **Black-legged tick (formerly called the deer tick)** and the **American dog tick**. The Black-legged tick is about the same size as the head of a pin and it is found in many parts of the United States. Black-legged ticks can carry Lyme disease, especially those in New England & parts of the Midwest. The dog tick is very common and can be up to one-half inch long. If you have a dog, chances are pretty good that you've seen a dog tick on its coat. This type of tick can carry a disease called Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

What does a tick bite look and feel like?

A person who gets bitten by a tick usually won't feel anything at all. There might be a little redness around the area of the bite. Some ticks carry disease (Lyme Disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever) that can be passed on to people.

Pets and Ticks

When dogs and cats are allowed to run loose, they may bring ticks from fields into your home and yard, where they may attach to people. Each fat, blood-engorged tick allowed to drop off a dog in or near your yard can lay up to 6,500 eggs. Dogs should be kept tied up or penned in a well mowed area during tick season (April - August). Monthly topical treatments, sprays, dip or dust treatments are available to control ticks on dogs and cats. Consult with your veterinarian for appropriate prevention and treatment. Always follow label instructions. Pets should be inspected for ticks daily. Ticks should be handled with caution and disposed of safely (please see "Instructions for Submitting Ticks...").

What diseases can be transmitted by ticks?

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) is a bacterial infection transmitted by the most common tick in Ohio, the American dog tick.

The name "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever" is somewhat of a misnomer since only about 2% of cases reported each year are contracted in the Rocky Mountain region. Most cases of spotted fever occur in the southern United States. From 2000 to 2003, Ohio confirmed 42 human cases.

Persons of any age can get RMSF, but about one half of the patients are under 20 years of age. Most cases occur between May 1 and July 31 of each year, the same period in which dog tick populations are at their highest levels.

RMSF occurs most commonly in areas where ticks and wild animals are abundant. In its immature stages, ticks feed almost exclusively on small rodents such as field mice and meadow voles.

The adult ticks seek larger hosts and are often found on dogs (as their name suggests). Adult American dog ticks will also readily attach to humans.

Symptoms of RMSF usually appear 3-12 days after tick contact. There is a sudden onset of symptoms which include: fever, headache and aching muscles. A spotted rash usually develops on the wrists and ankles on the second or third day of fever. The rash then spreads to involve the rest of the body, including palms and soles of the feet.

If you experience these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.

It is important to receive the appropriate antibiotics as soon as possible once RMSF is suspected.

The fatality rate for RMSF is about 4%. Most fatalities can be attributed to delay in seeking medical attention. If RMSF is recognized and treated early, there is usually a rapid recovery for those who are infected.

Lyme Disease

Lyme Disease is a bacterial infection carried by the Black-legged tick that can cause serious problems involving the heart, joints, and nervous system. It was first recognized in the United States in 1975 after an excessive number of childhood arthritis cases were reported near Lyme, Connecticut. Since then, reports of Lyme Disease have increased dramatically.



Research in the eastern United States indicates that ticks are most likely to transmit Lyme Disease to people during the nymphal stage after two or more days of feeding. Because nymphs are so small (less than 2 mm), they are often not noticed and may have plenty of time to feed and transmit infection.

Adult ticks can also transmit the disease, but because they are larger, they are more likely to be noticed and removed from a person's body within a few hours and so they have less time to transmit the disease. There is less chance of disease transmission if the tick is properly removed. The Black-legged tick is rare in Ohio. Only 11 Black-legged ticks have been proven to be established in Ohio. However, the fact that the Black-legged tick has been found in Ohio means that they are being imported into Ohio on migratory birds, travelers and their pets. From 2000-2003, Ohio confirmed 254 human cases of Lyme Disease.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease include a "bull's-eye" rash or ring-like rash developing 3 to 32 days after a tick bite. Symptoms may also include fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, significant fatigue, facial paralysis and cardiac arrhythmias. ***If you experience these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.*** If detected early, Lyme Disease is usually treatable with antibiotics. Late infection symptoms include intermittent or chronic arthritis and nervous system abnormalities. It is important to start antibiotic therapy to reduce the risk of arthritis, neurological, or cardiac complications.

Proper steps to remove a tick:

- 1) **Shield your fingers with a paper towel or use tweezers. Grasp the tick with steady pressure and pull it straight out.** Do not touch the tick directly. Do not twist or jerk the tick, this may cause the mouth parts to be left in the skin.
- 2) Take care not to crush or puncture the tick. RMSF can be transmitted from infected tick body fluids which come in contact with broken skin, the mouth or the eyes. Never use a hot match on a tick.
- 3) After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash hands with soap and water.

Instructions for Submitting Ticks for Testing:

- 1) **Keep the tick alive!** Dead ticks cannot be tested for Lyme Disease or RMSF, only identified. Please only submit ticks that have bit a human. Place the tick in a sealed container along with a small, moistened, piece of tissue or paper and close the container tightly.
- 2) Record the date, county and/or state where the tick was acquired.
- 3) Testing of ticks is provided by the Ohio Department of Health Vector-Borne Disease Lab. Contact the Franklin County Board of Health at (614)462-3160 to make arrangements for identification and testing.

Tips to reduce exposure to ticks and the diseases they may carry:

- ☐ Avoid weedy, tick-infested areas.
- ☐ Tuck pants into socks or boots and shirts into pants. Wear a long-sleeved shirt and a hat for added protection.
- ☐ Walk in the center of trails to avoid contact with long grass and brush.
- ☐ Wear light colored clothing so it will be easier to find crawling ticks.
- ☐ Use repellents containing DEET on clothing and exposed skin, following all label instructions.
- ☐ Make frequent inspections for ticks. Check children at least twice daily, paying special attention to the scalp and the area behind the ears.
- ☐ Keep yard and play areas well mowed to discourage tick infestation.



What you need to know about

TICKS

Rocky Mountain
Spotted Fever
and Lyme Disease



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